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Vol. I

DICK THE SHADOW



BY
J. R. Scott.

DICK THE SHADOW;

OR,

THE MYSTERIOUS TRAILS OF THE BACKWOODS.

By J. R. SCOTT.

Author of "Smokestack Bob," "Oath-Bound," "The Rival Scouts," Etc., Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT PROWLERS.

A MIDNIGHT moon glimmered down upon the clear shivering waters of the Miami.

They washed with gentle murmur against the wooded banks.

Afar in the woods, a night hawk hooted.

Beyond this not a sound broke the stillness.

But though the pathless waste of forest seemed deserted and silent, it was not.

One person at least, a human being, held watch there.

Standing rigid and motionless with folded arms, and gaze directed toward the opposite bank just in the edge of the forest, was a man.

And a white man, also.

In the semi-obscure light, had one been close enough, it could have been seen that the watcher was short and massive-shouldered.

His features were partly concealed by a beard.

His garments were of "buckskin," and bespoke his trade that of a trapper.

He was leaning partly upon a long-barreled rifle, peculiar to the Kentuckian of that period.

For an hour he held his mute position, and scarcely moved even a hand.

What he meant by this conduct, would not have been quite clear to an observer.

But it held a world of consequence to him.

Finally the expression of his face changed, and his lips moved in scarcely audible soliloquy.

"Dratted queer to me, whar they kin be. It's about time them pesky skunks war comin' this yer way, an' hyar I've waited nigh onto two hours, and not a sign as yet. Hal wot's that!"

The trapper made a slight start.

His rifle went up under his arm.

His finger lightly held the trigger.

The cause of this movement was a suspicious sound from the opposite bank.

"By the great lobster-pot, thar they kim. Milyuns on 'em, an' milyuns more, as sure as my name ar Sim Sladen!" The old trapper had spoken the truth.

A startling spectacle it was that met his gaze.

In the semi-gloom, like dark grisly ghouls, a half score of nude forms, with feathered top-knots, had crept down to the water's edge.

There they halted.

Apparently they were holding a deep consultation.

To a near observer these midnight prowlers would have been revealed as brawny-limbed, painted and feathered Shawnees.

What was their midnight mission?

They were in war-paint.

This boded mischief.

Their errand was probably a raid on some border settlement.

"They mean deviltry sure as preachin'," said eccentric Sim Sladen, as he watched them intently.

"Wot would they think if they only knew that Old Sim was on this side of the stream, watchin' on 'em?"

For some while the Shawnees held their place upon the river-bank.

Then a long, dark object was shot out partly into the water.

To Sim Sladen this object was easily recognizable.

It was a canoe.

The Shawnees stepped within it.

They were intending to cross.

The canoe was shot out into the current, and the paddle slowly applied.

Directly toward the point of land upon which stood the old trapper came the canoe.

Yet Sim Sladen did not change his position.

But stood immovable until the light craft grated upon the sands and the Indians all stepped out.

Then he stepped behind a walnut tree.

The next moment the Shawnees came up the bank and filed slowly, one by one, past him, so close as to have almost touched him.

Sim Sladen stood like a statue until the last had gone by, then emerged from his concealment.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAMP IN THE WOODS.

SIM SLADEN drew a deep breath as the last Shawnee passed him.

Then he ejected a huge quid of tobacco from his capacious mouth, and ejaculated in a whisper:

"Thet means deviltry, yer kin bet. Wall, that ar ther dirtiest crew old Sim have gazed on for many a day. Reckin I'll have a hand in this mess, yer bet."

Without further ado the old trapper turned and followed the Shawnees.

It required an unusual amount of tact and skill to do this.

But old Sim had been reared to woodcraft, and easily managed this.

Mile after mile was traversed through the undergrowth. Old Sim had begun to think that the trail would never end, when of a sudden he became conscious of the fact that his enemies had halted.

The moment he became aware of this he also halted.

Instantly his every nerve was upon the alert.

"Wot have they stopped for?" he thought. "Kin they have heerd me?"

But an explanation the next moment presented itself.

Right ahead through the trees old Sim caught a faint line of light.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "a clearing."

Such, indeed, was the nature of the country ahead.

But what the purpose of the Shawnees was had not as yet become once apparent to the trapper.

This mystery Sim was determined to learn.

The moments passed.

The old trapper became anxious.

"I hev got to make a shift," he muttered at length. "I hev a powerful curiosity to learn wot is ahead."

To accomplish this task required, he well knew, a shrewd amount of maneuvering.

But he did not hesitate at this realization.

Nothing daunted he set forth.

A snapping twig, a single misstep might betray him.

And bring the entire Shawnee horde down upon him.

He proceeded therefore with great caution.

Upon his hands and knees he made the risky detour.

And fortune favored him.

For half an hour later he became assured that he had crossed the danger line.

Though he was in a more perilous position than heretofore.

This change of base did not for the moment aid him.

But while standing in deliberation a startling development, which brought about a thrilling train of events, presented itself.

Of a sudden a dark form brushed past him, so close as to touch him.

Had the trapper not been well trained in his nerves he could have betrayed himself at that moment.

But he did not move a muscle.

This was his salvation.

The unknown, probably one of the Shawnees, loomed up into view for a moment, then disappeared in the gloom.

Sim Sladen did not waste time.

Accepting this as a cue, he turned and stealthily followed the other.

The Shawnee was proceeding toward the light which indicated a clearing.

Satisfied that a development of interest would soon present itself, Sim followed.

And all of a sudden a sight caught his gaze, which caused him to give a great start.

Directly ahead beyond the form of the Shawnee, through the branches was distinguished the faint glimmer of firelight.

A fire in the woods.

What could it mean?

Sim breathlessly asked himself this question.

Could it be a camp-fire?

At first thought the trapper rejected this theory.

Yet it had the appearance of such.

And as he drew nearer to it the old trapper became assured that such was the truth.

But who could it be?

Who was so extremely foolhardy or such an inveterate greenhorn as to make a fire at night in those woods, in the very heart of Indian country?

Sim Sladen pushed on rapidly.

He took a course to the right of the Shawnee he was following, to approach the camp-fire from a different direction.

A moment later his suspicions became verified. Standing in the shadows of the trees he gazed into the firelit circle of a camp about which, in various attitudes of repose, were stretched human forms.

CHAPTER III.

THE "GREENHORNS" CHAMPION.

SIM SLADEN was in a state of astonishment bordering on incredulity.

"The blasted fools!" he muttered.

Five in all were there in the camp.

They apparently were little aware of the dangers of the region in which they were, for no guard was visible.

"Are they mad," muttered old Sim, "or are they clean gone?" tapping his forehead.

The fire crackled brightly in the center of the camp.

Two of the five occupants of the camp were bright-faced lads of seventeen or more, one a young girl of slender and graceful form, which Sim could see, though her face was concealed.

The other two were men of robust build, but a texture of garments which at once betrayed the fact that they were not natives of the region.

"Greenhorns!" mentally ejaculated Sim.

But an enigma presented itself to the old trapper.

"How in tarnation did they get hyar? Great gimcracks! how did they git so fur inter the woods?"

This was indeed a puzzle to the old trapper, and only explainable in his mind in the conjecture that chance had aided them.

"Well, by the great lobster-pot of Moses! hyar's a task fur yew, Sim Sladen. Yew are the only friend these greenys hev got in the Miami Valley. It's left ter yew ter see 'em through, and how ter git 'em out of this diffikilty ain't no ways a clear show to this man."

The "greenhorns," as old Sim dubbed them, were indeed in a serious predicament.

And to extricate them was no slight undertaking.

But the old trapper did not falter.

"Save 'em I must," he muttered, "and specially ther petticoat. Don't see how they had ther grit ter bring her along."

It seemed as though some subtle influence had apprised the young girl that she was the subject of remarks, for she moved, turned upon her side, and then sat up.

Her face was revealed in the firelight.

And caused the trapper a start.

It was strikingly lovely.

A shimmering sheen of golden hair fell down over the slender shoulders.

The fair features were sweet, and the eyes soft and dove-like in their expression.

"Great lobster pots!" ejaculated Sim, "she's a beauty. Drat my skin, but if I was only young and good-lookin' once again——"

The old trapper did not finish the sentence.

The vision of loveliness had assumed an attitude of terrible fright, and sprang to her feet.

Her arm was pointed into the black depths of the forest, her eyes gleamed like stars, and she recoiled in terror.

A piercing scream escaped her lips.

"Father! Ned! look—oh! it is an Indian! God help us!"

The agonized cry was the signal for a startling succession of events.

A long, terrific Indian howl arose from the forest.

Black forms appeared among the trees.

The woods seemed to swarm with them.

They burst into the circle of light.

Brawny-armed, dusky-skinned demons, with savage mien and brandished weapons.

In a moment every sleeper was upon his feet.

But too late!

Thud!—the deadly tomahawk sank into the brain of the father, and his companion shared a similar fate.

But the two boys and the girl were spared.

In fearful terror, and horror, and anguish the three young people were seized by the brawny demons and securely bound with thongs.

Old Sim Sladen was powerless to render aid.

The old trapper was brave to a fault.

He would have given his life readily had it been to a good effect.

But he knew that it would be only throwing it away to interpose, and reflected that he could aid the survivors in a far more fitting manner.

We will not dwell upon the terrible emotions of brothers and sister at the fearful, agonizing spectacle of their father's death.

Let us draw a curtain over the unpleasant scene.

And next find our young friends waifs of the wilds, so to

speak, transported far into the interior of the Miami valley in an Indian town.

There they are held captive.

But one individual wended his way through the forest that night with a firm resolve.

"They will be taken to Red Bear's village. There I will track, and by the great lobster-pots, heaven and earth will meet ef I don't resky 'em. That's me every time, Sim Sladen, trapper an' Ingin fighter."

CHAPTER IV.

"DICK THE SHADOW."

"CRACK."

A wild Indian yell went up on the air.

The solemn stillness of the forest was broken by these sounds.

"Reckin I cooked the varmint thet time."

The speaker was a study.

He stood in the edge of a clearing in the middle of the vast forest.

Tall and angular and exceedingly spare in person, he was almost a rail in form.

Yet, in spite of his exceeding lankness of proportions, there were hard tissues and lines of muscle in his anatomy, which were capable of performing wonderful things.

Clad in the garb of a trapper, he was possessed of a thin and sharp type of features keen yet not unpleasant gray eyes.

In all the Kentuckian region no man was better known or more celebrated.

He shared his fame with such celebrities as Daniel Boone, Welzel, Kenton and others, and was known universally as Dick the Shadow.

Among the redskins he was much feared and hated as a deadly enemy.

Many a brave had been sent over the highway to the happy hunting grounds at the muzzle of his death-dealing rifle.

His real name nobody knew or ventured to inquire.

As Dick the Shadow, he was celebrated as an expert scout and Indian trailer.

He it was who had fired the death shot.

It had proved fatal.

With a despairing yell, the recipient had thrown up his arms and fell prostrate.

With a chuckle of satisfaction, Dick the Shadow crossed the glade and bent over his victim.

Bending down he felt the pulse.

"Gone ter a better land," he muttered, arising. "Wall, one more notch toward the fulfillment of ther vow of vengeance."

Saying this he turned the butt of his rifle over, and with his hunting-knife, added a notch to many already cut there.

This accomplished, he gave a last look at the red-skin victim, and then turned to leave the spot.

But he had not taken three steps ere he halted.

Something upon the ground had caught his eye.

He bent down.

A few grasses were displaced.

To him it wae a significant sign.

"Ah," he muttered, "a trail!"

So indeed it was.

Dick the Shadow was an acute translator of such things.

With an adeptness truly wonderful, he proceeded to follow the trail.

When he reached the edge of the forest he paused.

"Curious," he muttered; a mystified expression crossing his face. "One, two, three; a half-dozen were in the party. Part were whites and part reds. The whites mought hev bin prisoners, and *vice versa*. Won't do no harm ter foller it up."

Slinging his rifle over his back, Dick the Shadow took the scent.

With unerring precision he followed it through the undergrowth.

On he went.

Until of a sudden the trail came out upon the banks of a little creek.

Here a crossing had been made.

And in the sandy soil, Dick the Shadow made a curious discovery.

The imprint of a delicate foot was revealed.

Dick puzzled over it some moments.

"It's a female foot," he muttered. "But it ain't a squaw's foot. But bother my wits, what on airth kin a white woman be doing in this section at this time."

He did not pause long to ruminate.

"I kin guess the mystery," he said to himself. "Ten to one them dasted reds have made a raid on some white settlement, an' are carrying this woman and the others back home as captives. This ar' Red Bear's trail, and whar they hev gone is ter his village. Drat me if I don't give this matter an investigation at onct."

With this declaration the gaunt trapper struck away down the creek.

Following its course a ways he came out eventually upon the banks of the Miami.

And here in a clump of reeds he found a canoe concealed.

Launching it he seized the paddle, and with a couple of sweeping strokes sped out into the current.

He had not gone far, however, when he suddenly ducked his head.

Just in time.

A swift driven arrow passed over him, and a chorus of yells from the shore was followed by the appearance of a swarm of Shawnees, who sprang down into the river.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHAWNEE CAPTIVES.

MEANWHILE what was the fate of our young friends and survivors of the midnight massacre?

They were indeed greenhorns, as Sim the trapper had dubbed them.

Their father, Clark Wentworth, had been a merchant of Baltimore.

But his business not proving specially lucrative, he had abandoned it, and rashly started, uninformed and unguided, for the wilds of Kentucky.

The result of his foolhardiness or indiscretion we have seen.

It had cost him his life.

And placed his children, his dear ones, in a fearful predicament.

Captives among the savage Shawnees, it was hard to conjecture what possible fate might await them.

The girl was the eldest.

May was her first name, and she was a bright, winsome young girl.

The two boys were a year difference in age, thirteen and fourteen respectively.

Paul was the eldest and generally took the lead.

Harry was the impetuous one and given to hasty temper.

They had not recovered from the shock of their father's fate.

In the Indian village their captivity was extremely noxious.

May had been placed in the chief's wigwam, and was held in charge by the chief squaw.

Red Bear, with the fiendish cunning of his race, had noted in the budding beauty of the young girl an attraction which had at once aroused his cupidity.

"Wagh," he had ejaculated, with a grunt of approval. "White maiden grow much. Very pretty. Make Red Bear pretty squaw bime-bye."

Little poor May dreamed what fate the future held in store for her.

The boys' fate was far different.

They were given in the hands of different squaws.

In fact, they were virtually made slaves of.

To carry water from the creek, gather fagots, help dress the hides, and perform other exceedingly obnoxious duties became their portion.

It is unnecessary to state that this was by no means an agreeable lot to them.

But they dared not rebel.

The consequences were dire.

The old squaw, who was their task-master, would not hesitate to beat them soundly.

Harry was wont, in moments of hasty anger, to rebel, but he soon learned that it was better policy to submit to fate.

But both boys were too high-spirited by far to long submit to these indignities, without at least an effort at escape.

Wrapped in their blankets, side by side, in the teepee, one night, they formed their plans.

"Something must be done," said Paul, decidedly. "I for one do not intend to always remain here in this horrible place."

"Nor I," echoed Harry.

"But what shall we do?"

"Give it up."

"We must not give it up."

"Then you suggest some way out of the dilemma," said Harry, impetuously.

A moody silence was maintained for some moments.

Then Paul suddenly spoke.

"I have it."

"What?"

"The idea."

"Let's have it," said the young brother, nestling closer to his relative.

"To-morrow the tribe are going on a big hunt."

"Well?"

"That is providential."

"How?"

"It will give us an opportunity to escape."

"Yes," admitted Harry, "but where shall we go?"

"Down the river."

"What, in a canoe?"

"The same."

The younger brother was plainly getting excited.

"A royal scheme! But how can we manage to get the canoe?"

"That rests with Providence," said Paul. "But we will at least try it pretty hard."

At this moment a guttural grunt and a parting of the teepee curtains warned them that the guard was looking in upon them.

Finding the young captives, to all appearances, asleep, the savage withdrew.

Harry rolled over upon his side after an interval.

"Paul?"

"Well?"

"What shall we do about May? How shall we rescue her? That will be no easy matter."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLAN OF ESCAPE.

THOUGH the younger brother had little known it this very subject had weighed heavily upon Paul's mind for some days.

Now he came out of a half reverie with a start.

"I do not know, Harry," he said sadly, "how we may rescue our dear sister."

"But we must not leave her."

A deep struggle was going on in Paul Wentworth's breast.

"I fear we shall have to," he said.

"Never!" cried impetuous Harry. "If I have to die for it, May shall be rescued."

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Paul could not help but smile at the extreme earnestness of his younger brother.

"Of course, May must be rescued," he said. "But we must also save our lives if we can."

"But how?"

"I have proposed the plan."

"But how shall we get May?"

"We cannot get her."

"What, leave her?"

"Aye, leave her."

"Never—I will——"

"Wait, Harry," said Paul firmly, and with an air of command which the younger brother could not resist.

"Listen to reason. We cannot take May with us. That is out of the question. Now as this is an impossibility, the only proper thing for us to make our own escape effectual, is to follow up the plan of action I have proposed. If

successful, we can organize a relief party, and rescue May afterward."

Harry remained wrapped in thought.

"You are satisfied?"

"Yes."

"It is our only move."

"True. Yet I do not like the idea of leaving May."

"No more do I. Yet it is a clear impossibility to take her with us."

"Fortune may enable us to."

"It is not likely."

With this the two youths dropped off into slumber.

The next day great preparations for the hunt were made in the Shawnee village.

Red Bear himself was the most active participant.

A grand pow-wow was held previous to the start.

Drums were beaten, war-dances participated in, and the medicine man of the tribe gave offerings to make the hunt successful.

It would be many days before the hunters would return.

At length the ceremonies incident to the start were concluded, and the warriors took their departure.

The looked-for opportunity had come.

Success seemed to smile upon the plans of the boy captives.

The village was left nearly deserted, save for the old squaws and cripples who could not take the trail.

The duties of the boy captives were imposed upon them the same as usual.

But, instead of collecting fagots, their best endeavors were given to the successful embezzling of a canoe.

And fortune favored them.

One of the sharp-prowed crafts was drawn up just beyond the cover of a clump of willows which screened it from the village.

Getting into this, the boys by careful maneuvering managed to gain the center of the stream.

Skirting the shore carefully beneath the cover of the overhanging foliage they managed to put a goodly distance between them and the village.

Swiftly the paddles were plied.

Down the swift current they went at great speed.

Yet a nameless terror followed them.

They were by no means safe.

Instinctively they glanced fearfully up at the wooded banks as they shot down the current.

Expecting momentarily the appearance of a score or more of Shawnees.

But not a feathered top-knot showed itself.

A panther crouched upon an overhanging limb, and the coterie of song-birds of the forest were the only signs of life encountered.

The day was a mild June day.

The canoe glided swiftly down the current, and had it not been for their apprehensive feelings the boys would have enjoyed the situation intensely.

Gradually the day waned, and the shadows of night came on.

How far they had traveled they knew not.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK THE SHADOW MEETS WITH THE BOY FUGITIVES.

THE position of Dick the Shadow was by no means an enviable one.

Though he was in the center of the stream by this time he was not beyond the range of the Shawnees' rifles and arrows.

Whiz—past his skull went a bullet.

"Great gimcracks! Narrer escape that!" muttered the old scout.

He knew the canoe afforded him little protection.

It was, unfortunately, not impervious to bullets.

"Must make a change," he muttered.

The Shawnees had swarmed into the water.

The air was alive with their yells.

Whiz—went another bullet.

"Hoop-la! give us another!" yelled the indomitable Shadow.

He had laid over the gunwale of his canoe.

And now, with a slight movement, had slid into the water.

Grasping the canoe by the stern, for his rifle and equipments were yet in it, he swam toward the opposite shore.

By this time he had drifted a goodly ways down stream. Just a little below was a bend.

Once below this bend, and he would be protected from the Shawnees' bullets by a neck of land.

The trapper's purpose was not observed until it had been almost effected.

Then a fearful, baffled howl went up.

It rang through the tree-tops ominously.

This was followed by a final volley of arrows and bullets.

Then the trapper looked back.

He perceived a startling fact.

The savages were pursuing him down the opposite bank of the stream.

Just now Dick's progress was slow.

But in a moment he would be beyond the bend.

And the savages would be obliged to make a long detour.

Every nerve was strained in the exertion to gain the bend.

Now but a few yards intervened.

A rapid swash of the current and canoe, man and all were swept from range behind the jutting neck of land.

And now Dick was quick to act.

With a skillful leap he sprang into the canoe and seized the paddle.

With swift strokes he sped down the current.

Afar in the distance he heard the baffled yells of the Shawnees.

They were too late.

As well might they pursue an *ignis-fatuus* as the old trapper now.

And Dick the Shadow smiled grimly as he wielded the paddle.

He paddled on for miles, until, finally swerving in his course, he reached the shore.

Drawing the canoe up into a thicket, he set out into the forest.

Until nightfall he trudged on, and, when at length the

shadows of darkness became intense, he stretched himself out upon the fallen trunk of a tree, and gave himself up to slumber.

We will not follow his movements for the next week.

Suffice it to say that they were given to close watch of the Indian village and the movements of the savages.

Little success crowned his efforts in learning aught of the white captives.

But the indomitable Shadow was not the one to give up.

"I know they are thar," he ejaculated, with an air of conviction. "And resky 'em, or at least try the job, I will."

Once he met Red Bear in the forest.

He did not hesitate to step boldly up to the Shawnee chief.

"Howdy, Red Bear," he said, in his off-hand manner.

"How's times wi ye?"

"Wagh, white man, heap brave. What does the Shadow want?"

"Hev you in your village three white captives, two boys an' a gal?"

Red Bear started as though shot, and fixed an angry, penetrating gaze upon the cool trapper.

"Let the Shadow beware," he said, anxiously. "Let him not meddle with Red Bear's affairs."

With this he turned suddenly upon his heel, and before Dick could recover enough from his surprise to stop him, had disappeared.

"Great gimcracks," muttered the old trapper, ruefully. "Why didn't I wipe the pesky skunk out. Wot did I let him walk off in that fashion for?"

An hour later he stood on the banks of the Miami, and was electrified of a sudden, when around a bend shot a canoe, in which sat two occupants, no other than the two boy fugitives.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIM SLADEN ON THE TRAIL.

MEANWHILE what the adventures of old Sim Sladen, the trapper?

He was fully in earnest in his resolve to rescue the white captives, or die in the attempt.

He knew well the location of Red Bear's village.

For a week he hung about the spot.

And what was marvelous, did not chance to run across Dick the Shadow, who was also on precisely the same mission.

Sim was obliged to exercise great care.

His position held great danger.

Several times he had come within an ace of putting his foot in it, plainly speaking.

He was right in the midst of the Shawnee nation.

If suspicion once entered their minds of his presence, then all would be up.

They would leave no stone unturned to ferret him out.

Sim's hiding-place was an admirably selected one.

Upon a small eminence, not two miles from the village, upon the Miami, and commanding a full view of it.

A small collection of bowlders, beneath which a concealed opening leading into a small cavern, constituted the hiding-place.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESCUE.

The keenest eyes of the Shawnees had failed to penetrate it, and old Sim held his position in perfect security.

But so far his efforts had been unsuccessful.

He had been in concealment near enough to the village to see the two boy captives, but had been unable to establish a communication with them.

How to accomplish this essential thing he was at his wits ends to know.

"Drat the luck," he muttered. "The fates seem against me."

He skulked about the village both night and day.

The long-sought opportunity came at last.

And old Sim experienced a thrill of triumph.

The tribe hunt had left the village almost deserted.

Indeed, the old trapper would scarcely have been afraid to venture into the town single-handed.

He waited only for the cover of darkness.

Then crept stealthily into the shrubbery in the outskirts of the town.

The thing most to be feared was the dogs.

Their scent might betray him.

But drawing his hunting-knife, he placed it between his teeth, and kept on.

A midnight moon illumined the landscape.

This was detrimental to the old trapper's plans.

But fortune favored him.

By and by a cloud come up and obscured the great orb.

Now was his chance.

The entire village seemed enwrapped in slumber.

Sim had decided upon the teepee in which May Wentworth was held captive.

He knew it was Red Bear's teepee.

This was distinguished from the others by its size and the adornments.

Creeping carefully along from one teepee to the other, he gradually neared it.

Soon he had reached it.

The flap which served as an entrance was securely pinned to the ground, and an Indian guard slept just without.

Whether it was his duty to sleep or keep awake Sim did not pause to inquire, but knew that the fact of his being asleep was greatly in his favor.

He did not disturb his slumber.

But quickly resolved upon his move.

Softly he stole around to the back of the wigwam.

Bending his ear down, he listened cautiously.

And to his hearing came plainly the low, measured breathing of a human being.

He knew by this that there was some one slumbering on the other side of the buffalo hide.

Was it May Wentworth?"

Sim drew a keen knife from his belt.

Carefully, skillfully, he slit the aperture in the tanned hide.

An aperture large enough to admit his whole body.

Then of a sudden he paused, as though shot.

Heavens! the breathing had ceased.

What did it mean?

Had the sleeper been awakened?

Old Sim nerved himself for what was to come, and the next moment received a shock which electrified him.

THE old trapper was not prepared for what followed. And was greatly startled.

A hand parted the slit he had made in the tanned hide, and the next moment Sim was greeted with a vision which startled him, though it gave him a great thrill of pleasure and triumph.

The face of a young girl, beautiful and sweet in its expression of surprise, greeted him.

"Heavens!" gasped Old Sim, in his surprise, forgetting himself.

Then with a start he recovered himself.

May Wentworth, for it was our heroine, regarded him without the least shade of distrust.

She saw that he was a white man.

She was a brave as well as philosophical girl, and saw only in the present contingency a chance for escape.

"Oh, sir, have you come to rescue me?"

Old Sim caught his breath.

"Great lobsters-pots, hev I? Wall, yer kin bet yer beaver hides on that, missy. But for goodness sake, don't speak so loud agin, or we'll be in a hornets' nest in two jiffeys."

In spite of the great thrill of hope which shot over her, and the consciousness of her perilous situation, May could not help a smile at the quaint expressions of the old trapper.

She read him at a glance.

"He is a backwoodsman," she said to herself. "He can save us all, thank Heaven!"

"Don't thank Heaven, nor nobody else until we are out of the fire," said old Sim, hurriedly. "Kin you crawl through this hole?"

"Yes, very easily; but——"

"What?" interrogated Sim.

"I have two brothers, who are also captives in this place—Harry and Paul. Oh, sir, can you not rescue them?"

"Yes—yes," said the old trapper, "after I resky you. One thing at a time, you know. Are you ready? Step through."

But May still hesitated.

"Oh, sir, can you not rescue them first?"

Sim paused in sheer surprise.

Was the girl crazy?

"What, leave you here, and run the risk of getting caught in hunting up the boys? No, mam, if you please, you will follow me, and do jist as I tell ye, now, or everything will go wrong. Don't fail, now, or I may not be able to resky any of ye."

Neither May nor the trapper knew that the two adventurous lads were at that moment far away on the road to liberty.

"But the boys?" still hesitated May.

"Never mind ther boys. They will keep until I kin git back to 'em. Follow me, now, and keep—whist! be careful."

Without further hesitation, May complied with the trapper's commands.

There was a terrible risk to be incurred in getting out of the Indian town.

But fortune aided them.

They reached the outskirts of the village before anything of an alarming nature transpired.

Then a dark, sinewy body shot almost between the trapper's legs.

"Wagh!" ejaculated Sim, and with a not very prudent impulse, up went one of his by no means small feet.

"Ki-yi-yi!" the dismal howl went up on the air.

It was the signal for a general alarm.

A dozen other yells from various parts of the village followed.

Sim, under his breath, uttered an exclamation of disgust.

But he did not waste time.

Half-leading, half-dragging May by the arm, Sim plunged onward.

Breathlessly they sped onward.

By this time the whole Indian town was in a furore.

The escape of Red Bear's white captive had been discovered.

Loud yells and cries came to the ears of the fugitives.

Glancing backward, Sim saw lights flashing among the teepees, and could dimly distinguish savage forms flitting hither and thither.

But the coterie of dogs, which are always complement to an Indian village, again proved the means of increasing the peril of our friends.

Before Sim and his charge had got fairly beyond the confines of the village the howling pack were at his heels.

The old trapper was not dismayed, though.

If the worst came, he would not hesitate to defend himself and his fair charge.

Such of the braves as were in the village had taken the trail, and, aided by the dogs, were not a dozen rods behind.

An emergency by no means cheering to the fugitives.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOYS MAKE A FRIEND.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Dick the Shadow was surprised at sight of the boys in the canoe.

Around the bend they had floated into view.

He was more than surprised, he was stupefied.

And for a moment so far lost control of himself, as to stand with mouth agape watching the canoe, until suddenly one of the boys paused and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

It was Paul who did this.

He had caught sight of Dick.

And with natural suspicion, seized the paddle, and propelled the canoe to the opposite side of the stream.

But his fears were quickly disarmed.

For Dick put up his hand and stepped down to the water's edge.

"Fear not, boys. I am your friend."

Paul desisted in his paddling and the canoe floated idly.

Both boys regarded the trapper with a keen scrutiny.

"Who are you?" at length said Paul.

Dick smiled at the question.

"I won't eat you," he said.

"We do not know you."

"I am a friend."

"What is your name?"

The trapper started, and a swift change of color came over his face.

For a moment some emotion seemed to prevent his speaking; then he said:

"I am known as Dick the Shadow."

Harry looked at Paul and vice versa.

"We do not know you," said Paul.

"Nevertheless I am your friend. I have been looking for you."

"Looking for us?"

"Yes."

"But——"

"It is all right," said Dick, with a queer smile. "You can see I am a white man."

"We do see that."

"And of course am your friend."

"We are glad to have friends. We need them," said Paul, guardedly.

"Come ashore."

"I hardly think we have time."

"But you must not go further."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"Why?"

"Hear me," said Dick, impressively. "Boys, I am your friend. I mean you no harm. I am a trapper and scout. I have hunted in these woods for ten years, and know every part of the Shawnee country. You must not go down this river any further."

"But you will tell us why," said Paul.

"Because there is danger."

"Danger?"

"Aye."

"What do you mean?"

"Behind every bush lurks an Indian. Behind every tree is a deadly rifle, whose bullet will find your heart. Take my warning; I am your friend."

It was a moment of indecision.

The two brave lads exchanged glances.

What should they do?

Should they believe this man, who, though a stranger to them, had a straightforward appearance.

They might rue it.

It was a serious reflection.

"What do you say?" said Harry.

"Done," said Paul, dipping his paddle in the current.

"This man is a white man, Harry. He is a scout and can aid us in getting out of this wilderness. Let us accept his offer of friendship."

The canoe's course was changed.

A few prompt strokes and it grated upon the sands.

Both boys sprang out.

They proffered their hands to the trapper.

Dick gripped them both warmly and a strange moisture came into his eyes.

The frankness of the two lads impressed him deeply.

"We accept you as a friend," said Paul, with dignity.

"And are very glad to secure your co-operation."

"I hope you may never regret it, boys," said the trapper. "Rest assured, your trust in me will never be misplaced."

"You will give us your assistance in escaping from this perilous locality?"

"With all my heart," said Dick.

"But stay, we must now give our best efforts to May's rescue," said little Paul decidedly. "We must rescue her at all hazards."

"Your sister?" queried Dick.

"Yes, sir," replied Paul.

"She shall be rescued before another week," said the trapper determinedly.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAIL.

PAUL recited his story from the beginning to the trapper. From the horrible massacre at the midnight camp in the woods, to his escape from Red Bear's village.

Dick listened with interest.

He had divined the most of the story before, from the mysterious trail he had followed through the forest.

But the particulars of course he had never learned.

"Red Bear never will put his dirty paws upon you again if I kin help it," he said with determination.

The boys speedily acquired a great friendship with the trapper.

It was an act of Providence that had placed them in his care.

They felt indeed quite secure.

But the minds of both now reverted to the position of their sister May.

"She must be rescued," said Paul.

"She shall be," said Dick.

The old trapper meant what he said.

An ungovernable curiosity had held possession of him until now.

"What object had your father in view may I ask," he finally ventured, "in coming into the Shawnee country in the fashion that he did; didn't he realize what danger he was gittin' inter?"

"I do not think he did," said Paul sadly.

"If he had wanted to settle, he had ought to have struck forty miles further down the Miami. He would been safer anywhere near Booneville——"

"Booneville!" ejaculated Harry. "That is the name of the town he was trying to find."

"Ah! then he mought hev lost his way."

"Very likely," said Paul.

The eyes of both boys were filled with tears, and the trapper could see that it was a tender subject to them.

Accordingly he did not again bring it up.

"But durn my scalp," he muttered; "jest how I'm goin' to git my paws onter that gal, I don't know."

"This is our best time," said Harry.

"Why?" interrogated Dick.

"Because the braves are all out on the hunt."

This was news to Dick.

"Great Jupiter!" he ejaculated, "is that so? Then

we are all right. Come on, and by the great horn spoon, if all the hull Shawnee nation is there, we'll git the gal."

A tedious tramp it was through the forest.

The boys had traveled a great distance from Red Bear's village down the Miami.

The almost imperceptible current of the great river had been swifter than had been imagined.

They trudged along bravely, through the undergrowth, trying to keep up with Dick, the Shadow's, long strides.

Gradually the day waned.

The shadows of darkness came thick and fast.

Finally Dick halted.

"Are yer tired?" he queried, turning to the boys.

Both were obliged to admit that they were.

"Wall, there couldn't be a better place to camp than right hyar."

"Shall we build a fire?" queried Paul.

Dick, the trapper, started, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"By ther great horn spoon!" he ejaculated. "Wall, you are a precious pair of greenhorns, to be sure."

Paul did not like this.

There was a derisive peal in the old trapper's laughter that nettled him.

"Greenhorns or not," he said, angrily, "we are at least capable of taking care of ourselves, and under no obligations to you."

Paul was sorry the next moment for the sharp retort.

A rather queer expression came over the strange trapper's face, and then a strange, soft, subdued light came into his eyes.

"I ax yer parding, boyees," he said, in a strangely choked voice. "I didn't mean nothin' but a joke, and wouldn't hev ye feel under obligations to me, anyway, whatsomever I moight do for ye."

Paul, crestfallen and ashamed, was about to make reply, when the trapper gave a start, and the next moment had fallen upon his knees.

His keen eyes were scanning the ground—his fingers parted the grasses.

Crude as they were in woodcraft, both boys knew that he had struck a trail.

For some time Dick examined it, and followed it a distance into the woods, but the queer, mystified expression never left his face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER.

SIM SLADEN was in no enviable predicament.

Had he been alone he could have laughed his enemies to scorn.

But with his charge, May Wentworth, to look after, such a thing was out of the question.

Still he was determined.

And ere he had penetrated far into the copse, a happy thought struck him.

The banks of the Miami were not a great distance away.

There Sim knew of a secreted canoe.

Once in the canoe upon the broad river's bosom in the darkness he could outwit his pursuers.

No sooner did this occur to him than he hastened to put the idea into execution.

Diverging to the left he sped onward.

Assisting May, he spoke encouraging words.

"Keep up a leetle, that's a brave gal," he ejaculated.

"We'll soon be in safety."

Poor May though almost fainting with exhaustion strained every nerve.

At length the river bank was reached.

The canoe was pulled forth from its concealment.

But not in time to avoid a crisis.

Down the banks came plunging a couple of Shawnee braves.

They were armed with tomahawks, and made a murderous dash for the trapper.

Sim was quick to act.

May was in the canoe.

He would not have time to enter the canoe and avoid the attack.

Seeing this with a desperate shove of his foot, he sent the light craft out into the current.

And May, crouched in the stern, was carried out into the broad river.

The next moment old Sim was locked in a death struggle with the two Shawnees.

Probably never was man placed in so perilous a predicament.

But this realization only added to the old trapper's desperation.

The other Shawnees were already plunging through the undergrowth.

Sim realized that what there was to be done must be quickly executed.

With a dexterous movement he threw one of his combatants, and then grasping the other with a back lock by the shoulders, he brought his head swiftly and with stunning force down upon the savage's physiognomy.

The result was that the savage's face was almost instantly reduced to a pulp, his features being battered entirely out of shape.

And blind, and half dead with pain, he was flung headlong into the river.

One enemy disposed of.

But by this time the other had gained a fresh grip upon his white foe.

And this time Sim did not secure his former advantages.

But the struggle was short, but sharp and terrific.

With a prodigious exertion of muscle Sim swung his enemy back, and then with a mighty effort wrenched himself free.

The next moment one quick leap carried him out into the river.

The canoe by this time had nearly reached the middle of the stream.

Toward it Sim swam.

But close behind was his pursuer.

The other Shawnees also came up at this juncture, and a number of them plunged into the current.

It was an exciting race.

An Indian is noted for his swimming powers.

Old Sim was an adept.

But it could be plainly seen that he was being gained on.

May in the canoe, paralyzed with terror, watched the contest.

Inwardly she prayed as she never had before for her champion's success.

Two-thirds of the distance had been accomplished.

Sim had now struck a current which was bearing him swiftly toward the canoe.

His pursuers were now close behind.

The old trapper strained every nerve.

Nearer drew the canoe.

Now he made a quick stroke.

His hand gripped the gunwale.

He arose partly out of the water.

But at that moment his Shawnee pursuer gripped his buck-skin hunting shirt.

A knife flashed in his hand, and it looked as though that moment was old Sim's last.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK FOLLOWS A STRANGE TRAIL.

It could be plainly seen by Shadow Dick's features that he was much mystified by the mysterious trail.

Again and again he subjected it to a critical examination.

"Durn my picter," he ejaculated, "it's mighty curus. I don't like it. Wagh!"

Neither Harry nor Paul volunteered any opinion, for the matter was something entirely foreign to them.

It was now too dark to attempt further deciphering of the mysterious trail.

Dick could scarcely wait for the dawn.

The boys, wrapped in blankets, slept very soundly, but not the trapper.

His eyelids did not close.

And, with the first break of dawn, he was again at work upon the trail.

Harry and Paul were both sound asleep.

The trapper regarded them with a sympathetic yet troubled look in his eyes.

"I must wake 'em up," he said. "And yet I dislike to. They are very tired. Yet it wouldn't do to leave 'em hyar to sleep it out, fer some prowling red-skin might git 'em."

A moment of hesitation.

And then Dick bent softly over Paul.

Very distinctly he pronounced the lad's name in his ear, at which Paul started, and opening his eyes with an effort, looked up into the trapper's face.

"I don't like to wake ye a bit," said the old scout, apologetically. "But there is business ahead, you know."

"Certainly," said Paul. "It was very wrong of us to oversleep."

With which he sprang to his feet.

Harry was also aroused, and then without further delay the start was made.

It was mere play for Dick, experienced trailer that he was, to follow the trail through the forest.

But of a sudden it brought them out upon the banks of a little woodland stream.

And here the old trapper again paused.

In the soft sand was the imprint of a foot.

And it was not the moccasin of a Shawnee, or even of a white trapper.

But, what electrified both Paul and Harry when shown it, the clear imprint of a lady's shoe.

"Hurrah!" shouted irrepressible Harry. "It's May's shoe. I know the shape of the heel."

"Hist, Hal, don't make so much noise," admonished Paul.

Dick, the trapper, looked up quickly.

"Do you recognize the shape of that foot?" he queried.

"I do," said Harry.

"I think I do," said Paul.

"It is the footprint of your sister?"

"It looks like it."

"I know it is," said Harry. "I know the shape."

Dick drew a long breath.

For a moment he knelt over the foot-print.

He appeared to be wrapped in meditation.

"Curses!" he muttered at length. "It is past my comprehension."

"What is?" queried both boys.

"Why, if this is your sister's footprint, how does it happen that she has been here?"

This was an enigma.

"At last accounts," continued Dick, "she was a prisoner in Red Bear's village."

"It may be——" began Paul, and then paused.

"Yes, so it mought," said Dick, instantly divining his thoughts. "She may have escaped, or been rescued, which the latter is very probable. Thar was a man with her—a white man—and what's more, a man used to the woods."

"Then some white trapper like yourself may have rescued her——"

"Very likely," interrupted Dick. "An' I calculate that will justify us in following this trail up."

Accordingly, they kept on following the mysterious trail.

It could not be supposed that the pursued could make as rapid progress as the pursuers; consequently it was soon evident that our friends were gaining rapidly.

Soon Dick announced it as his belief that the fugitives were not more than a mile ahead.

This cheered the boys.

They pressed on more rapidly.

The mile was soon traversed.

But as yet no sign of the pursued.

But ere the night shades had begun to settle down they came out upon the banks of a creek, and a sight rewarded their gaze which caused Harry and Paul to bound forward with glad, joyful cries.

The savages were close upon him.

But the old trapper was undaunted.

Too often he had faced death.

When the savages had clutched his hunting shirt he wheeled.

He was quick to act.

The emergency called for promptitude.

With a lightning movement he drew his hunting-knife from its sheath.

Unwary savage.

Too near he was to retreat.

Once—twice—with a sickening thud the bright blade flashed aloft.

Each time it found a home in the unfortunate red man's breast.

With a dying war-whoop, succeeded by a gurgling gasp, as the current carried him under, the savage fell back.

Old Sim now lost no time.

With a quick spring he was in the canoe.

The other savages were quite near.

But they were not soon enough.

With a rapid stroke Sim shot the light canoe down into the current.

For some miles he did not abate his efforts.

The sounds of the pursuing savages had long since died out in the rear.

For the nonce they were safe.

But old Sim knew that it would not do to abate caution in the least.

They were yet in great danger.

The woods about were infested with the red enemies.

He paddled on rapidly.

With long, sweeping strokes he shot the canoe down the current.

May, now that the danger was over, became much reassured, and sat upright.

She glanced at the black, wooded banks upon either side with a shiver.

Any shrub might conceal a savage.

Any moment a death-arrow might be fired from the darkness.

But as they progressed a damp fog began to settle down over the river.

This was good fortune.

Every moment it grew thicker.

Soon it veiled the banks from view.

The fugitives were safe.

At least from Indian eyes.

The chief danger now was in rapids, and Sim put trust in his keen sense of hearing to obviate that.

The trapper now paddled more leisurely.

Until now he had not dared to speak.

Now an overmastering sense of curiosity impelled him to address May in an undertone.

"What may be yer name, gal, if I may be so free as to ask?"

At this uncouth and direct query May could not repress a slight smile, but replied:

"My name is May Wentworth."

"Yer father was the man that was killed that night in camp?"

CHAPTER XIV.

DOWN THE MIAMI.

THE position of old Sim was by no means an enviable one.

"Yes, sir."

"Pity. I seen the hull transaction. I would hev helped ye then if I could, but it war impossible. One man could do nothing agin sech a crowd."

May covered her face with her hands.

She shivered.

It was a terrible recollection to her.

"Wot did yer father cum so far inter ther wilderness ter?" again queried old Sim.

"He meant to settle, sir."

"But, great powder-horns an' lobster-pots, didn't he know that he was walkin' inter ther jaws of death?"

"I presume not, sir."

The trapper shook his head.

"A tarnal pity. What will ye young people do?"

"I know not," said May, despairingly. "If you can rescue Harry and Paul, and we can safely reach a settlement, there we may find means to make a livelihood."

The trapper drew a deep breath.

"Wall," he ejaculated, sententiously. "Thar's one thing about it, miss, old Sim Sladen ar' my name, an', by hookies, I'll be a friend to ye."

"And rescue Paul and Harry?" said May, eagerly.

"Aye, if it takes a leg."

"Heaven will bless you, sir——" began May.

But Old Sim gave a mighty start and ceased paddling.

Distinctly through the fog came to the ears of both the light dip of a paddle, and the swish-swash of the water.

CHAPTER XV.

FINIS.

It was a warning of immediate danger to Sim.

He sat like a statue in the canoe.

And a sibilant whisper escaped his lips.

"Don't move for the world now, Miss Wentworth. Keep perfectly quiet."

The sound of the approaching canoe was in the rear.

And coming down the current.

A sure sign of pursuit.

Nearer it came.

Old Sim's eyes penetrated the fog.

But as yet encountered nothing.

Every moment was now fraught with the most intense excitement.

May turned deathly pale.

But no fear took possession of her.

She was brave—very brave—in spite of the great peril.

Who could the unseen canoeists be?

Unquestionably their pursuers, the Shawnees.

If overtaken, the consequences might be dire.

Although old Sim sat his lips firmly, an inward resolution to sell his life in defense of his charge held possession of him.

Nearer drew the canoe.

With a swift current, it would soon reach the spot where they were.

And now for the first time the trapper made action.

With a swift sweep of his paddle noiselessly in the current he swerved his canoe toward the shore.

And at this moment a startling fact became apparent to him.

The unknown canoeists had *also* ceased paddling.

A thrilling sense of peril came over him.

What did it mean?

Had they heard him?

But his fears were the next moment effectually dispelled.

A fortunate circumstance at this moment intervened in his behalf.

A slight breath of wind for a moment lifted the fog in a section.

And disclosed not fifty yards distant a canoe drifting on the bosom of the river, in which sat a half dozen painted Shawnees.

At this moment our friends were safe in the black shadow of the river bank.

It was a narrow escape.

Old Sim drew a deep breath.

One moment the canoe remained motionless.

And then with swift strokes it was impelled toward the opposite bank.

Then the occupants got out, and lifting the canoe upon their shoulders, disappeared in the forest.

It was the last gauntlet of peril.

Soon the fog shut down.

Then old Sim resumed his course down the stream.

They were beyond pursuit.

Inwardly May Wentworth returned a prayer of thanks to the Almighty above.

Until daybreak Sim paddled down the stream.

Then he shot the canoe ashore.

"We shall have to travel by land now," he said, as with rude gallantry he assisted May to land.

"Where are we going?" queried the young girl.

"I am going to take yer ter Booneville first," said Sim.

"Thar yer will be safe. An' then I am going back for ther boys."

"Heaven grant you may rescue them also," said May, devoutly.

All that day they trudged through the forest, and the next day.

They could not make very rapid progress.

But the second night, just as old Sim had decided to halt for the day, a great surprise greeted them.

Of a sudden, through the underbrush in their rear, sprang forth three human forms.

Old Sim seized his rifle, but as quickly dropped it.

The next moment May was sobbing in the loving embrace of a couple of bright-faced lads, no other than her dear brothers Paul and Harry.

Dick the Shadow gripped hands with old Sim and explanations followed.

Reader, my simple tale of backwoods adventure draws near its close.

Suffice it to say that our youthful adventurers, under the watchful care and guidance of Sim Sladen and the Shadow Scout, reached the settlement of Booneville in safety.

They were profuse in their expressions of gratitude to the two hunters.

Paul and Harry obtained employment, and soon owned a claim and log-cabin of their own.

May soon after was fallen in love with by a sturdy young settler, and the two were wedded and lived happily.

And in after years, when the Indian troubles were all over and peace came to the Miami settlement, old Sim became a frequent and welcome visitor at the cabin home of the Wentworths.

Dick the Shadow followed his strange nomadic career for some years, until at length he was called to his final account by a Shawnee arrow.

And now, dear reader, having led you, in my rude

fashion, through the wilds of Kentucky in threading the mysterious trails of the backwoods, and having brought my chief characters to a propitious point, I will say to you all *au revoir*.

[THE END.]

J. R. SCOTT, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 564 "Oathbound," No. 555 "The Rival Scouts," No. 544 "Dick Wright," No. 535 "Red River Bill."

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